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# ENG 3600-001: The Bible as Literature

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### **ENG 3600.001: The Bible as Literature**

**Course Description:** No single book other than the Bible has had the shaping influence of Western thought, initially as revealed truth then as the motive to search for the historical truth of its production and the situation of its authors. Read and studied for two millennia, the Bible has moved innumerable intelligent men and women, but biblical reading has most often been centered in theological concerns. Scholars, Jews and Christians as well as secular readers have found the Bible a source of profound literary force and authority, the virtues and conflicts therein instructive for writers of great stature from Dante and Milton through Blake and Joyce to Melville and Douglass. In recent decades, critical literary methods of reading the Bible have offered perspectives that have affected even professional, theological biblical studies. Rarely assimilated now in early youth, modern readers of literature all too often encounter biblical allusions without recognition, and everyday English speakers employ—often unknowingly—hundreds of phrases and images lodged from previous generations who knew the King James Version, perhaps only by ear.

This course seeks to open biblical reading through literary analysis to a broad range of perspectives that includes students of literature and students of the Bible—atheists, agnostics and the religious from all faiths are all welcome. Our principal text will be *selected* Hebrew and New Testament chapters from the King James Version (KJV), still arguably that translation which best preserves the literary qualities of the original languages. Its philological deficiencies and sometimes misleading archaic constructions, however, make the New Revised Standard Version a necessary reference, so we will also have that translation for consultation when needed.

**Course format, requirements and grading:** Lecture and discussion, preferably much more the latter, dependent on your willingness and preparation to contribute to discussions. Grading will be based on participation (discussion, reading quizzes and brief responses—20%), a critical essay (8-10 pages—40%), a midterm essay examination (15%) and a final essay examination (25%).

### **Course texts:**

Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, ed. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*  
 John Gable, et. al., ed. *The Bible as Literature* (4<sup>th</sup> ed)  
 Wayne Meeks, ed., *The Harper-Collins Study Bible* [NRSV] (1997)  
 H. Marks, ed., *The English Bible: King James Version*, Vol I (Norton Critical)  
 G. Hammond, et. al., *The English Bible: King James Version*, Vol II (Norton)

Our principal texts will be *The English Bible* throughout the course, but I will distribute a set of recommended readings in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* and *The Bible as Literature* as the term unfolds. Please also feel free to consult *The Harper-Collins Study Bible* on questions of historicity, translation and context that is more modern than the KJV.

### **General Policies:**

**Grading Standards:** I shall follow the EIU English Department Guidelines, distributed in class. In all cases, I shall use a plus and minus system to distinguish, say, a high B from a low one.

**Attendance:** I do take roll, and I evaluate attendance only indirectly in the context of your participation in the course (15%); however, each two days is the equivalent of a week in the fifteen-week semester. Obviously, cuts have a direct influence on your participation.

**Conferences:** These are at your request unless I ask to see you. Please ask for help as soon as you feel you need it; please don't wait until the last few days of class.

**Submission of work:** Essays should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of the paper only, titled and indicate the following: name, date, course and section number, and assignment number. Exercises and quizzes must be legible.

**Late Essays:** For each day that the essay is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade: an A essay due on Friday will be an F by the next Thursday. If difficulties arise, please see me.

**Plagiarism:** The English Department Policy

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's own original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)--has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

If I discover an act of plagiarism, I shall exercise the right to the fullest extent possible. (See *The Blair Handbook*, pp. 242-244, but see also pp. 228-242 for a further discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and how to integrate properly your material from sources.)

### **Students with Disabilities:**

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.